



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman**

**For Immediate Release
2007/166**

March 7, 2007

ON-THE-RECORD BRIEFING

**Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Thomas A. Shannon
On the President's Trip to Latin America**

**March 7, 2007
Washington, DC**

MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone, and welcome. My name is Barbara Rocha. I'm a public affairs officer here at the Department of State. And as you know, the President is leaving tomorrow to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. He is going to be traveling with Secretary Rice and Assistant Secretary Shannon. And Assistant Secretary Shannon will take your questions after brief opening remarks. This is on the record but it's off camera. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Okay, welcome. Thank you all very much for coming. As you know, the President leaves tomorrow on his trip to Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. As you know, the President gave a speech the other day related to the trip, related to our larger interests in the region. We're looking forward to this trip. It's been a long time in the making. As you know, this will be his eleventh trip in the hemisphere and his eighth trip to Latin America. Some of the countries he has visited before such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, but two of the countries -- Uruguay and Guatemala -- he has not visited as President of the United States. When this trip is completed, overall, as I noted, he will have spent eight trips in Latin America visiting eleven countries in total during his presidency, which is more trips to the region than any president in the history of the United States. He has also, as you know, attended three Summits of the Americas and hosted an OAS General Assembly in Fort Lauderdale also -- a presidential record.

As the President noted in his speech, we're focused on delivering a positive message in the region, a message of cooperation and collaboration as we engage with our partners to understand better their needs in order to be successful in deepening their democracies and in addressing the deep social issues that the region faces, especially poverty and inequality and social exclusion.

We believe that following 2006, which as you know was a very important electoral year in the hemisphere -- when you count up, I believe, all the heads of state elections and major legislative elections, about half of the 34 democracies had some kind of major electoral event -- the result of that was a series of new governments coming into office and this is the start of, I think, a great

opportunity for us this year in 2007 to begin to engage with these new partners and deepen a series of relationships which we think have been, you know, very, very useful for the United States, very useful for the region.

But I'm very happy to take your questions and any comments you might have.

QUESTION: Let me ask, Mr. Shannon, what would be the issue that you guys wouldn't want to have to discuss with the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: I'm not quite sure what it is you're after when you say what issue we wouldn't want to discuss.

QUESTION: You have a clear agenda? You have a number of issues that it's always on the -- is on the table and all that. But I wonder if there are issues that are non-resolved, unresolved on the commercial side of the bilateral relations that at the moment wouldn't be ready for discussion. That's my meaning.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: I see, okay. Well, I mean, again, you know, we're going in to this trip highlighting what we consider to be a positive agenda. And part of that positive agenda is how we engage and how we communicate and what kind of dialogue we have in the region, and therefore we're prepared to talk about any issue the Brazilians want to raise with us. From our point of view, there aren't issues that are off the table in terms of discussion, recognizing that there are always issues that just aren't ready for resolution or can't be resolved for political reasons. But again, you know, the point is to have an open dialogue and an open conversation so that when we leave the region we have a very good understanding of the kinds of challenges our principal partners are facing and what we can do to help them.

QUESTION: I was specifically thinking about -- there is a visit to an ethanol facility. There is a big emphasis on collaboration, making this a world commodity. But Brazil has been insisting on the reduction or the getting away with the tax that Brazilian ethanol pays in the United States. So that would be something that I would imagine falls under my definition of something you wouldn't want to discuss, if not.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Well, we know -- I mean, the Brazilians have said they will raise it, so we expect them to raise it. And as our National Security Advisor Steve Hadley made clear yesterday in his comments to the press, this is an issue that is, like all tariff and tax issues, driven by our Congress and therefore, you know, not one that we think is kind of ripe for any kind of resolution at this point in time.

But I would highlight the fact that Brazil has been so successful in its -- in promoting flex-fuel automobiles and flex-fuel motors that, from what Brazilian experts tell us, and this was made clear when Under Secretary Burns and I traveled to the region, that Brazil won't be able to meet its internal demand. So a focus on an export market at this point in time seems to reflect a Brazilian understanding of its own market that is in the past and not in the present or in the future.

QUESTION: And yes, how much of this trip has to do with President Chavez and his influence throughout the region? And my second one, very short: Did you hear what the opposition leader -- the Colombian opposition leader said yesterday about President Uribe that he's a real representative of the paramilitaries in Colombia? Do you have any comments on that?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: First, as I mentioned at the start, this will be the President's eleventh trip in the hemisphere, his eighth to Latin America, the other three obviously being in Canada. And it is part of an engagement with the region that we consider to be over time sustained and steady and very positive. And you know, coming off an electoral year, 2006, this gives us an opportunity to reach out to lots of new governments or reconfirm our relations with governments that have been reelected.

And in that regard, it is not related to President Chavez. Again, it's important to understand that we've been around for a long time and our relationship in the region has been around for a long time, and we think that this President's record is significant not only in terms of the number of times he's visited the region, but if you look at almost any indicator -- and I made this point during my congressional hearing. If you look at almost any indicator, we've doubled foreign assistance on an annual basis, we've put over 600 more Peace Corps volunteers in the region annually, we've done free trade agreements with ten additional countries in the region that now covers two-thirds of the GDP of the region. In other words, any indicator you look at shows a dramatic increase in U.S. engagement in the region since President Bush came to office.

And an engagement that's been focused on creating economic opportunity and then working with countries to create individual capacity and national infrastructure to take advantage of that opportunity. And I think that this is a record the President can be proud of, but it reflects a proactive agenda in the hemisphere that doesn't respond to the political styles of any individual leaders; it responds to our national interests and what we perceive to be the needs of other countries in the regions in order to be success as democracies.

QUESTION: Isn't aid down, though?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: No, not. It's way up.

QUESTION: I mean, members of Congress were all saying that the trends --

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: They're wrong. They're wrong. And we can show you.

QUESTION: Is that just Millennium Challenge Account or --

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: What's that?

QUESTION: Is that just Millennium Challenge Account?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: No, it's everything. I mean, what they're focusing on is an '08 budget that is about at 1.5 billion --

QUESTION: You can -- it doesn't matter. You can face that way. I can hear you back here. I'm sorry.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: You know, during the previous administration, the U.S. was spending on average about \$800 million a year in foreign direct assistance in Latin America and the Caribbean. Under the Bush Administration, we've averaged about 1.6 billion. So just in terms of foreign direct assistance, the amount has doubled. But it has also -- as components of this development assistance have also increased over time. The '08 budget request is about 1.466 billion -- we'll round it up to 1.5 -- so on a trend line it's a little bit lower than where it's been over the past several years, but it's still considerably higher than it was previously.

But Millennium Challenge money is in addition to that, and that's about another \$860 million. And then there's also debt relief funds which have kind of increased the fiscal and the financial space that countries have. And under a three-part initiative, the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative, which was a Clinton Administration initiative, but a lot of the debt relief has taken place during this administration. And then the G-8 initiative, which was a Bush initiative, and then importing the G-8 initiative into the Inter-American Development Bank, which is another Bush initiative, we have a total of over \$17 billion in debt being forgiven, which amounts to about \$555 per person.

And the President in his speech did not take credit for the amount of debt forgiven under the Highly Indebted Poor Country initiative because it was an issue that began with the Clinton Administration. But as -- so he took credit for the G-8 and for the IDB debt, which amounts to about 8 billion. But whichever amount you want to take credit for, it's still impressive. And the per capita amount of the debt relief is impressive because, on average, if you look at the five poorest countries in the region -- Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Bolivia -- they average about \$50 per person in terms of health care and we're relieving debt that is going to amount into the hundreds per person.

QUESTION: And what about Colombia? Sorry, you didn't answer my second question about his comments and --

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: I'm not going to, no.

QUESTION: -- that he's trying to stop Plan Colombia because it's financing the paramilitaries in Colombia, he says. This is Senator Petro.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: That's ridiculous.

QUESTION: Yeah? Okay.

QUESTION: But why then everyone thinks that this administration has not paid attention to the region? I mean, it's like everyone else is saying, and all the analysts we speak to and all the experts and all the congressmen we speak to, they said this administration has not paid attention to the region. And then you come and you say, no, no, no, we did have and you give us all these numbers. So everyone is wrong?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: When it comes to not paying attention in the region, yes. It's pretty obvious, isn't it? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Delahunt (inaudible) saying that Egypt gets \$2 billion a year, only Egypt, and that (inaudible) and also the 2008 budget, more than 50 percent, if I'm not mistaken, is concentrated in Cuba and Haiti. So if you're looking to reach out to friends, what else are you planning to see in the future just (inaudible) from that?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Yeah. Well, you have to remember that foreign assistance is not the only way we engage with people. And actually, what we've done over time is recognizing that we need to get as much value for the money we're investing in the region as we possibly can. As we've made -- as we've prioritized our needs in the region and prioritized how we spend our money, we have concentrated our money. And right now, 72 percent of our money gets spent in the Andes and in Haiti and -- because in many ways that's where some of the biggest and most dramatic challenges are for democracy, and those challenges being how a democratic state confronts poverty, inequality, but also the security threats that -- counterterrorism -- that drug trafficking and terrorism causes.

But how we engage in the region is much more than our -- just our foreign assistance. And if you look at trade policy, for instance, as I mentioned, we've concluded free trade agreements with ten additional countries, and counting Mexico and Canada that makes 12 countries in the region that we've concluded free trade agreements with. This is two-thirds of the GDP of the hemisphere.

And if you look at -- if you combine those free trade agreements with our preferential access programs like the Andean Trade Preference and Drug Eradication Act* and the Caribbean Basin Initiative, 85 percent of all the goods entering the United States from the region enter duty free, and that's huge when it comes to economic development. And in fact, although job creation figures always are kind of hard to come by, our analysts who look at this think that over time the Andean Trade Preference and Drug Eradication Act* has created about a million jobs in the Andes -- in Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. And again, that is not direct foreign assistance; it is about opening our markets to the region and using the linkage between markets to drive economic growth and job creation.

But you know, when you look at debt relief, when you look at our trade policy, and then when you look at how our societies linked and when you look at what we've been doing in order to facilitate the movement of remittances from the United States into the region, remittance levels have been increasing dramatically over time. And depending on who's doing the counting, right now remittances run anywhere from \$45 to \$50 billion a year from the United States to Mexico to the Caribbean, Central America, and for the most part the Andes, although we estimate that about \$2 billion a year in remittances probably go to Brazil also.

* Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act

But when this Administration came into office, the transfer cost of the remittance was about 15 percent. Working through our Federal Reserve, through our Treasury, with the Inter-American Development Bank and with other financial partners, we've been able to create market conditions that have reduced the transfer cost to about 5 percent. And what that decline in transfer costs means as remittances increase is that about \$5 billion a year go directly to the people who are receiving the remittances. In other words, they're not skimmed by those countries -- I mean, by those companies that are actually transferring the remittances. And that comes out to about \$300 per family that receive remittances and that's a huge impact. And again, it's a reflection of how we are engaging and facilitating communication between societies.

QUESTION: Do you have any figures to compare how much aid is Chavez giving to the region and how much administration Bush is giving?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: No, I don't.

QUESTION: Because they say that 75 percent million of -- to train and the education program, somebody called it like, you know, it's nothing compared to what Chavez actually do and give.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Well, again, you know, this isn't a competition and we've never kind of perceived it or understood it as a competition. Because what we're attempting to do with our assistance and aid is not buy favor or to create a dependent relationship, which is what President Chavez wants to do. What we are attempting to do is build capacity so that we can have partners that are strong and independent, but democratic and committed to the same kinds of political values and the same kinds of common interests that we have.

Because we believe it's in our interest to have a region which is strong and competitive so that as a hemisphere we can work together to build the markets and the industries that are going to be needed to compete in the world. And therefore our purpose in our engagement is to open markets, to open governments and to create the capacity that will allow these governments first to address their big social problems, but then to move in the world in kind of a confident, independent way because we think that's the kind of partnership that best benefits us. And therefore that is the focus of our assistance programs, that's the focus of our trade policy and that's the focus of how we try to facilitate connections between societies.

Our understanding of what President Chavez is up to is quite different. I mean, he has a message for the region which is confrontational, it's conflictive, it has a heavy dose of anti-Americanism which we don't consider to be positive for enhancing cooperation in the region. And ultimately, it's about creating dependency, dependency on cheap oil, dependency on foreign assistance which is political in nature.

QUESTION: How do you feel about the demonstration in Buenos Aires, you know? It's just the other side of the --

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Democracy is a great thing. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Mr. Shannon, on Mexico?

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that question? I'm sorry. So the thing about promoting the regional ethanol market is that -- does that go into this direction of creating independency from oil and specifically from Chavez oil?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Yeah, there's a couple of things to say about that. First, as the President noted in his State of the Union Address, this is an administration that is going to be committed to reducing dramatically our dependence on hydrocarbons and we'll be looking for alternative fuels and renewable energy sources. And obviously, ethanol and biofuels are going to be an important part of that.

But we also recognize, as you look out across the region, that you've got lots of countries out there that have a lot of agricultural potential that could be turned into energy potential, and that these are countries that face big social and economic development challenges and to a certain extent have had their ability to respond to those challenges stymied by spikes in oil prices. And they've had to divert kind of precious public sector monies to addressing these increases in oil prices.

And by working with Brazil on a biofuels initiative, we're not only addressing the issue of energy security and improving the environment by reducing hydrocarbon emissions, but we are also, I think, contributing to the ability of countries to get greater control over their own destinies by being able to supply some of their energy needs through their agricultural sector. And that will increase the independence of these countries and improve their ability to address social and development issues.

QUESTION: On Mexico. The State Department has giving unprecedented praise to the new Mexican Government on the drug war, especially because of the recent extraditions of high-profile people to the U.S. I understand your point that your engagement in the region is not financial, but many have compared these actions of President Calderon to the ones of President Uribe. Now, there doesn't seem to be, though, a clear-cut relation between the amounts you are praising Mexico for fighting drugs with the amount you give him in assistance. And my question is, when President Bush visits Mexico will he put on the table all the things and praise - I mean, resources and money to fight the *drug on wars*, terrorism, border security? Is there something else?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: The President, in kind of a press roundtable he gave yesterday, you know, said that one of the things he's looking forward to when he gets to Mexico and sits down with President Calderon is the opportunity to talk with him more about those issues, just those issues. Because we recognize that Mexico has taken some very dramatic steps, beginning with President Fox, but with President Calderon, his decision to send federal troops into the northern part of Mexico, his decision to extradite major drug traffickers, was a very clear signal from the very beginning of his administration that, number one, the heads of organized crime organizations were not going to be safe in Mexico; that the Mexican Government was going to prosecute them and, if necessary, extradite them; and that the federal government was prepared to take dramatic steps in order to ensure the security of Mexican citizens. And we need to respect and understand that. We need to praise it and we need to find a way to respond to it.

And in that sense, you know, I think this trip is going to be very, very useful because the President -- so that the two presidents will have an opportunity to sit down and look at what that assistance could be.

QUESTION: So can we expect some specific deliverables in terms of getting some more assistance or resources to Mexico?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: I think that's the goal. But we have to sit down and have a better understanding of what's necessary.

QUESTION: Sir, if I could ask you about Colombia. There's a number of U.S. hostages that have been held there for a number of years and their families fear that they've been forgotten. And they also fear that the U.S. is considering a rescue operation to get them out. This has been something that the one video of these people, they've said that they have guns trained on them, so please don't try to rescue the families or they'll be killed. Could you tell us whether this is still a priority for the U.S., whether this is something you plan on bringing up when you're down there and where the State Department stands on a rescue?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: The answer to the first part of the question is, yes, it's a priority. It's always been a priority. It remains a priority. If you travel to or visit the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, the photographs of the three hostages are prominently displayed. Everybody in the Embassy passes those photographs on a daily basis. And I can tell you that in all of our conversations with Colombian officials, the three hostages figure very, very prominently. And we're committed to their safe return, and we recognize and understand the heartache and the hardship that this kidnapping has placed on their families. And this has been a long time. So we are going to do what we can to ensure their safe return.

QUESTION: And what can you say about a raid? I mean, that's the main fear of the families that other governments are willing to negotiate and the FARC is demanding a prison exchange, but the U.S. is the one that's holding out and the families fear that if there is a rescue operation instead that their family members will be killed.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: All I'm going to say is we're committed to their safe return. And we have made it clear to the Colombian Government as it has sought on several occasions to negotiate a humanitarian accord with FARC, which has always failed because of the FARC and not because of the Uribe government, that we would not stand in the way of that humanitarian accord; quite the contrary, that that humanitarian accord were to bring the release of those hostages, we would be very happy.

QUESTION: And the U.S. would recognize the danger in a raid?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: I'm not going any further.

QUESTION: Sir, yesterday, the State Department came out with its Annual Human Rights Report and it showed that most of these countries that the President will be visiting have a very

poor human rights record. Starting with Brazil, the first leg of the tour, it talks about death squads and crimes committed by police officers and with plenty of impunity. Are those topics that Secretary Rice will deal with during her trip?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Well, as we talk about democracy, you know, human rights are important component of democracy, and so naturally human rights issues and the social issues that are facing democracy are always part of our agenda. So I mean, one assumes that these issues could be raised and probably would be raised.

QUESTION: Ambassador Shannon?

QUESTION: Can I ask just a quick question about -- two questions, if I may. Lula is going to come to the Camp David retreat just two and half weeks after he meets with Bush. You know, how are you going to split the agenda? I mean, this two-part meeting so soon after one another, it just seems a little odd. What's going to be discussed in Brazil and then what may be discussed or what kind of follow-up would you do in Camp David?

And the second part of my question is a lot of pundits and many U.S. journalists too are going to take stock a week from now from this trip. And what would you suggest would be a measure of a success or failure of this trip?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: In regard to our conversations with President Lula, our relationship with Brazil is so big that we won't have any trouble in finding things to talk about. And in some ways, you know, our trip to Sao Paulo is a quick one. We arrive the evening of the 8th and we have an opportunity to work through the 9th before we depart for Montevideo, and there's no way we're going to be able to address kind of the breadth and the depth of our Brazil relationship in the short time we're in Sao Paulo. So the opportunity to be able to continue the discussion a few weeks later is welcomed and, I think, you know, very useful because again the relationship is so large that we could spend days on it.

QUESTION: And the success or failure of the trip, and kind of how would you measure that?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Well, again, this is -- this trip is about showing that we have a positive agenda in the region, that we have over time created relationships in the region that are open, that are productive and where we and our partners can talk about those issues that are most important to us.

But we recognize that in the region, the ability of democracy to deliver the goods, the ability of democracy to show that it can meet the big social and economic development challenges to the region, is really the defining challenge in the region and the defining challenge for democracy. And therefore it's our hope that coming off this trip, we will not only have deepened our ability to, you know, to talk with some of our most important partners in the region, but that we will have also begun to kind of chart a way forward in terms of how we help these countries more than we already have in terms of meeting their development challenges.

QUESTION: During the President's visit to Guatemala, do you think that will be on the table the issues of immigration or the deportations of Guatemalans from the U.S. and the child adoption issues since Guatemala is one of the countries that Americans most adopt children? And what do you think is the importance of the visit of the President to Guatemala and its relation to Central America?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: I'm sure all the issues you've mentioned will be discussed in one fashion or another. You know, we've had several meetings with the President Berger and his government over the past several years, and the issues you noted are always important issues in the discussions. We're really happy to be going to Guatemala. Obviously, you know, because of CAFTA and because of the fact that three Millennium Challenge Account countries are in Central America, because of the importance of the immigration debate here in the United States and Central America, this gives us an opportunity to engage in a region which is important to us, but also visit a country that the President hasn't been able to visit in Central America.

But also what's interesting about Guatemala -- one of the many things that's interesting about it is, of course, that it's a country with 50 percent of its population being indigenous, but it's a country that's committed to free trade. And I think what we will see in the President's trip is an opportunity to visit areas that are largely indigenous, where indigenous communities are taking advantage of CAFTA and taking advantage of trade opportunities to improve their livelihood and the well-being of their communities through trade with the United States and throughout Central America.

QUESTION: With regard to Uruguay, the visit to Uruguay is seen as problematic by some because if the U.S. pushes too hard Uruguay to sign a free trade agreement, this could undermine Mercosur. Could you comment on that?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Look, first, we're really happy to be going to Uruguay. When President Vazquez came here, he had what I thought was a great meeting with President Bush. I thought both of them connected in a personal way, but also connected in terms of an understanding of the challenges the region faces and the challenge that Uruguay faces. I mean, the Uruguay has in front of it a big opportunity and Uruguay recognizes that it's part of Mercosur, it's part of South America, but that within a Mercosur context it needs to find ways to connect with a globalized economy and needs to find ways to enhance its trade relationship with all its partners.

And what we have done in our -- in a series of engagements with Uruguay, and most recently in the signing of a trade and investment framework agreement, is lay the groundwork for deepening that commercial relationship. And we understand and recognize that Uruguay conducts its relationship within a context that's dominated by Mercosur, and so we're not going there to push anything. We're going there to listen to President Vazquez, to listen to Uruguay and determine what more we can do to enhance a trade relationship which is in our interest but is certainly within Uruguay's interest, and we think over time expanding our trade in Mercosur is in Mercosur's interest.

QUESTION: Mr. Shannon, thank you. I wonder if the administration, if it's fair say is trying to win hearts and minds in Latin America. And if so, is there any concern about the fact that these trips might -- of the President might be counterproductive? I was there in Panama when he was there in November 2005. A major thoroughfare in the city was closed down for a full day before he arrived and a long time after he had left. The disruption to hundreds of thousands of people meant -- was seen by many as yet another example of the arrogance of these visits where he rarely connects with ordinary people and really shows very little concern for how his policies impact on the lives of ordinary people. Could I suggest to you -- I ask you if these visits are counterproductive.

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: No, they're not. I mean, we recognize that security is always an issue wherever he visits, and that's just kind of the reality we live with. But the trips themselves we think have a profoundly positive impact simply because we do believe that by going into the region, by visiting the countries, that it is a sign of a willingness to engage and also a sign of respect.

And I think if you haven't had a chance to watch the speech, and I believe the video is now on the White House website, but at least to read the speech, I think what you'll see about it is an effort to find ways to express what we think is the impact of our policies in the lives of some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the societies that we are going to visit.

And ultimately, that is the measure of the success of our policies; does it touch people, does it improve people's lives who do live in the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of these societies? Because ultimately, as I mentioned before, this is the challenge that democracy faces.

QUESTION: Sir, you mentioned that the -- as you mentioned, the visit to Brazil is very brief and so any -- therefore, the deal that you intend to strike with Brazil in terms -- in relations to ethanol, it will be closed here? And could you outline already some of these details of this deal, how it --

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: Well, I mean, to a certain extent, we've done that already. I mean, when Nick Burns was in Brazil and in other conversations we've had, we've highlighted what we would have envisioned, some kind of memorandum of understanding and what its contents would be.

And its contents would reflect largely things that we already have entrained and that is -- you know, sharing research and development, looking for ways to allow Brazil and the United States to work with countries that are interested in developing a biofuels industry, to share our own experiences in terms of how best to do that. And then third, to create the International Biofuels Forum, which we launched on Friday in New York with Brazil, South Africa, India, China, and the European Union, which is all about working to create the regulations and codes necessary to make it an international commodity of ethanol and biofuels.

And we see these three areas of work where we're -- our private sectors and our governments are already connecting as being essential to kind of unlocking the energy potential of the agricultural sector in the Americas.

QUESTION: At this stage, is there already a Caribbean or a Central American country in which this project could -- where you envision this project happening?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: None have been specifically identified; however, I can tell you that there's a long line, both at our door and at Brazil's door.

QUESTION: Ambassador Shannon --

MODERATOR: This is the last question.

QUESTION: Yes. You said several times today that you have a positive agenda for Latin America. And according to the President, the goal is to complete the revolution of Simon Bolivar and my question is --

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: And George Washington.

QUESTION: And George Washington, yes. But to complete the revolution of both, is it possible to do that without engaging with Bolivia and the president of Venezuela?

AMBASSADOR SHANNON: We would love to engage with a Bolivarian president of Venezuela, but he seems intent on not engaging with us. And our message has always been that we have been open to a positive relationship and that we have always thought there are concrete areas where our engagement could be useful to both countries. But the Bolivarian gentleman has made clear through his rhetoric that at least now, he doesn't see the value of that kind of engagement.

But we have sought to make clear that again, we go into the region looking to be a positive voice, looking for countries that want to be partners with us, and that we hope our engagement in the region is defined by cooperation and collaboration. And the degree to which countries want to work with us, and we think the vast majority, if not nearly all, do want to work with us, then we're prepared. But the degree to which some countries decide they don't want to work with us, that's their decision also.

Thank you all very much.

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